

## **Moving Beyond Collections:**

### **Academic Library Outreach to Multicultural Student Centers**

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Few issues have stirred as much discussion and debate in the academic community over the past three decades than that of diversity. While its working definition is elastic, “diversity” is an administrative and intellectual construct that typically encompasses concerns about the recruitment and retention of students representing racial and cultural minority groups, the promotion of an inclusive campus climate for students representing diverse cultures, and the development of academic programs that explore the history, language, and culture of a variety of racial and ethnic communities within the United States (Grant and Ladson-Billings, 1997; Smith, Wolf and Levitan, 1994). But, while many scholars have examined both the development of academic programs aimed at promoting knowledge about diverse American cultures, and the factors that may contribute to minority student success in college (either in the classroom or as part of the co-curricular activities typically managed by student affairs professionals) (Turner, et al.,

1996), there has been little attention in the literature of higher education to the ways in which the academic library can support campus diversity initiatives.

Academic librarians, by contrast, have demonstrated a keen interest both in the ways that their collections can support academic research into racial and ethnic minority group experiences in the United States, and in the ways that they can deliver information and instructional services to diverse campus communities. Academic librarians have developed an extensive literature of practice related to providing services not only to students of color, who make up the subject of the present study, but also to a number of other groups of students who are typically included in any broadly-conceived discussion of diversity on campus, including: first-generation students, adult and returning students, and Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered (GLBT) students (Instruction for Diverse Populations Committee, 2004; Neely and Lee-Smeltzer 2001; Riggs and Tarin, 1994). Retaining a focus on those campus diversity initiatives aimed at students of color, and building both on the model for designing and delivering academic library services to diverse populations explored by Downing, MacAdam, and Nichols (1993), and Downing (2000) and on the “instructional outreach” model described in Johnson, McCord, and Walter (2003), this study suggests that one effective approach to improving services to diverse users is to focus on building collaborative programs between the academic library and one of the most common student service programs aimed at communities of color – the multicultural student center.<sup>1</sup>

### **Diversity and the Academic Library**

Diversity is a key concern both for libraries and for higher education in the United States. Within the broader context of higher education, the call for increased diversity is

reflected in efforts to better recruit and retain students representing racial and ethnic minority groups, to hire a greater number of staff and faculty representing racial and ethnic minority groups, to better address multiculturalism in the academic curriculum, and to provide academic and student support services that address the needs of identified groups of students (e.g., Banks and Banks, 2001; El-Khawas, 2003; Gainen and Boice, 1993; Rendon and Hope, 1996; Talbot, 2003; Turner, et al., 1996; Wilkinson & Rund, 2000; Wilson, 1999). Within the context of American libraries, diversity is recognized as a “key action area” for a field committed to “providing the highest quality library and information services for all people.” This commitment is reflected in advocacy at the national level to improve the library services provided to members of racial and ethnic minority groups, to provide greater access to information and research relevant to the experience of diverse communities in the United States, and to more effectively recruit people of color into the library and information services professions (American Library Association, 2005). Academic libraries are uniquely situated at the intersection of two professional communities – librarianship and higher education – committed to supporting diversity through education, outreach, and advocacy. Even so, academic library support for campus diversity initiatives has been uneven.

A commitment to supporting diversity initiatives across campus is not a deeply-rooted feature of the service profile of many academic libraries. Unlike, for example, the public libraries that have made outreach to underserved communities an important part of their mission for decades, many academic libraries are faced with the challenge of balancing long-term commitments to core services with a desire to address relatively recent diversity initiatives in higher education. Many academic programs in the broadly-

defined area of Ethnic Studies (e.g., African-American Studies), for example, are less than 30 years old, and efforts to address the problems related to recruitment, retention, and persistence of students representing historically underserved groups are of even more recent vintage. Interest in better serving these programs, however, is strong.

Many academic libraries, for example, have developed “diversity committees” that address the call to increase recruitment of librarians of color into the academic library profession (e.g., Diversity Committee, 2005), and others have taken responsibility for providing information and instructional services to students pursuing academic studies in the fields that might be subsumed under the broader rubric of Ethnic Studies (e.g., Munro, 2005). Unfortunately, the connections between these efforts and campus diversity initiatives – especially in the area of student services – are often less well defined than connections between the academic library and the students and faculty of traditional disciplines. Simply put, we have done a better job developing structures to support diversity initiatives within our own profession and using existing structures to support academic programs that include diversity-related subjects of study than we have developing structures to support the wide array of student services and co-curricular programs aimed at enhancing diversity among the college student body.

Collection development services and traditional liaison activities (e.g., research consultation, course-integrated instruction) aimed at relevant academic departments are the most well-developed feature of academic library services to diverse users. The University of Oregon (Munro, 2005) provides an excellent example of library support for research into topics of interest to students and faculty in the field(s) of Ethnic Studies. The University of California, Berkeley, likewise, provides access to a variety of

information resources designed to support academic programs in African-American Studies (2005, March 19), Chicano Studies (n.d.), Ethnic Studies (2005, March 11), and more. Diaz (1994) and Burns (1995) provide an introduction to collection development issues for librarians supporting academic programs in these areas, as do professional associations of librarians in these fields (e.g., African American Studies Librarians Section, 2005). Finally, Oka, LaGuardia and Griego (1994) provide an example of how instructional services can be designed to support students in the field of Ethnic Studies. Formal academic programs, however, are only one of many avenues through which librarians might communicate with, and provide services to, students of color, and services related to the acquisition and use of collections are only one way in which the academic library can provide support for campus diversity initiatives.

In an age much concerned with assessment and accountability, Kuharets, Cahalan, and Gitner (2001) argue that one of the most important measures of the worth of any library is “its dedication to serving ethnic populations” (p. xii). To meet this measure, academic libraries (and librarians) committed to serving faculty, staff, and students of color must move beyond collections and beyond familiar liaison relationships with academic programs and departments to take advantage of the full range of information and instructional service opportunities that come with outreach to student service programs designed to support the recruitment and retention of students who represent diverse and traditionally underserved groups.

### **Instructional Outreach to Diverse Communities**

Downing (2000), Osborne and Poon (1995), Simmons-Welburn (2001), and Simmons-Welburn and Welburn (2001) have identified the importance of coordinated

outreach efforts to a variety of minority student groups and minority-serving student service programs for any library committed to effectively meeting the needs of a diverse community of users. Moving beyond the traditional liaison relationship with academic departments, these authors advocate for the development of ongoing relationships with multicultural student groups, academic and cultural support centers, and recruitment and retention programs that serve many minority (and other first-generation) college students, including Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and McNair Fellows.<sup>2</sup> Downing, MacAdam and Nichols (1993) used “outreach” as a framework for describing their efforts to provide a variety of services to diverse student users. More recently, Johnson, McCord and Walter (2003) described this approach to building relations across campus based on the role of the librarian as teacher as “instructional outreach,” and Albin, et al. (2005) suggested how instructional outreach can form the foundation for developing and sustaining substantive partnerships between academic libraries and student service programs. Before turning to a discussion of how one might apply the idea of instructional outreach to working with diverse users through a multicultural student center, a brief review of existing programs is in order.

The most celebrated model aimed at providing academic library services to students of color is the Peer Information Counseling (PIC) program launched at the University of Michigan and later adopted by the University of Arizona (MacAdam and Nichols, 1989; Downing, MacAdam and Nichols, 1993; Winston, 1995). In this program, students of color are hired and trained by librarians to help provide direct information services to other students of color in the research library environment. While many libraries do not have the resources available to fund so comprehensive an approach to

meeting the need to enhance library services provided to diverse student users, there are important lessons that can be taken from this approach and more widely applied.

While working with the PIC program, for example, Downing (1994) identified a number of barriers that students of color may face in making effective use of the academic library that other students may not, e.g.:

- students of color may come to campus from K-12 schools where libraries were under-funded and library services were limited;
- lack of diversity within the library profession may be reflected on service desks that do not include information professionals of color, which may, in turn, make students of color less likely to approach service desks or to make use of research assistance, consulting services, etc.; and
- changing terminology and standards for collecting and describing information related to topics of interest to students representing diverse communities may make it particularly difficult for students to locate information relevant to chosen research topics.

The rising importance of the Internet in higher education (Jones, et al., 2002) has set an additional hurdle before students of color and other “non-traditional” students, who may be less prepared to make use of this technology for educational purposes owing to the continuing (and increasingly significant) “digital divide” between those who have regular access to the Internet (and, more broadly, to personal computers) during their K-12 years and those who do not (Sax, et al., 2004). Downing and Diaz (1993), Downing (2000), and Jacobson and Williams (2000), among others, have identified strategies for effective instruction of diverse users, and Munro (2005) has provided a primer on how to

address the issue of locating library materials on topics related to “diversity research,” but much work remains to be done in helping students of color overcome these barriers to effective library use.

The PIC program also highlights the significance of using peer educators as a means of providing information services to diverse student users. Peer educators are a familiar feature of many student services programs (Ender and Newton, 2000), including new student orientation, academic advising, first-year-experience, and academic support services. Alternately known as peer advisors, peer mentors, peer facilitators, or peer tutors, these students have also long been a significant part of the academic support provided on many campuses by writing centers. The PIC experience demonstrates how this model might be applied within an academic library, but more recent experiments in instructional outreach suggest that there is also significant value in bringing peer educator communities across campus together in such a way that approaches to providing peer support in academic and co-curricular programs can complement developing models of peer information consulting (Currie and Eodice, in press).

Complementing efforts such as the PIC program to bring students of color into the library are those that focus on developing partnerships with programs that support campus diversity initiatives. Perhaps the most common example of this type of outreach is found in services provided to K-12 and incoming first-year students of color through academic enrichment programs such as Upward Bound and “Summer Bridge” (Garcha and Baldwin, 1997; Simmons-Welburn, 2001).<sup>3</sup> Another popular campus program with which an academic library might collaborate to support the information and instructional needs of students of color is the multicultural student center. As Norlin and Morris (1999)



wrote in their study of library outreach to these centers, such efforts demonstrate that “the library not only embraces diversity but also is proactive in helping [support] the recruitment and retention of minority students” (p. 151). Despite the potential suggested by such a partnership, Norlin and Morris found few collaborative programs had been developed. Of 40 student services administrators responsible for multicultural student centers responding to their survey, only 15% reported any formal contact with their respective libraries. Even those few reported that contact with the library was “minimal,” and none felt that the support provided by their libraries for their academic support programs was sufficient.

In brief, a number of librarians have identified strategies for providing information and instructional services that are sensitive to the needs, interests, and learning styles of diverse student communities. Likewise, several have suggested that outreach to student groups and student service programs meant to serve the academic and social needs of diverse students is the direction that academic libraries must take if they are to effectively support both individual students and campus diversity programs. Few, however, have developed substantive and sustainable partnerships with one of the most common diversity initiatives, i.e., the multicultural student center.

### **Diversity and Instructional Outreach at Washington State University**

Washington State University (WSU) is one of two comprehensive research universities in the state of Washington. Established in 1890 as the state’s land-grant institution, the university maintains a flagship campus in Pullman, a city in the rural southeastern corner of the state, as well as three “urban campuses” in Spokane, Richland (Tri-Cities), and Vancouver. In addition to these academic campuses, the university

supports ten learning centers located around the state, as well as cooperative extension offices in each of Washington's 39 counties. In 2003-2004, the Pullman campus enrolled approximately 19,000 students, while thousands more participated in undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs housed on the newer campuses, learning centers, and extension offices, or delivered through distance learning options such as teleconferencing and Web-based instruction.

Diversity is a significant concern at WSU, where, for example, out of a student population of 23,241, only 559 (2.4%) were African-American (*Washington State University Data Book*, 2005). A complete description of the racial and ethnic composition of the WSU student body as of Fall 2004 is provided in Table 1.

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Total Student Body (n=23,241)</b>
American Indian/Alaska Native	114	178	292	1.3
Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	601	623	1,224	5.3
Black/African-American	272	287	559	2.4
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin	387	507	894	3.8
International	689	541	1,230	5.3
Not Indicated	994	957	1,951	8.4
White	7,833	9,258	17,091	73.5

**Table 1: Washington State University Enrolled Students, by Gender/Race/Ethnicity, Fall 2004** (Source: Washington State University Data Book, 2005)

Given these demographics, it is no surprise that diversity is one of the “core values” embodied in the strategic plan guiding the work of this academic community:

We are committed to a culture of learning that challenges, inspires, liberates,

and ultimately transforms the hearts, minds, and actions of individuals, eliminating prejudice. Our differences are expressed in many ways, including race, sex, age, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, religion, class, philosophy, and culture. Respect for all persons and their contributions is essential to achieving our mission (Washington State University, n.d. – a).

Institutional commitment to this core value is represented by the availability of academic programs in the field of Ethnic Studies (Office of Admissions, n.d.) and of a wide variety of resources for students of color (as well as students representing other groups identified as worthy of attention in the above statement) (Washington State University, n.d. – b).

Many of the resources aimed specifically at supporting the social integration and academic success of students of color at WSU are housed in the Office of Multicultural Student Services (n.d.- b). The Office of Multicultural Student Services (MSS) supports a variety of initiatives aimed at the recruitment and retention of students of color, including mentoring programs, leadership education, academic support programs, and four cultural centers: African-American Student Center; Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Center; Chicana/o Latina/o Student Center, and Native American Student Center (Office of Multicultural Student Services, n.d. – c). Together, these four cultural centers comprise the Multicultural Student Center, which is housed in a central campus location as part of the student union. While the services and resources provided through MSS are independent of other campus units, they complement services and resources available both through student cultural groups (Campus Involvement, n.d.) and more broadly-based student services programs (e.g., Student Advising and Learning Center, n.d.).

The Washington State University Libraries provide a full range of collections, services, and electronic resources to the university community through a system of six libraries on the Pullman campus (Agricultural Sciences, Architecture, Education, Health Sciences, Humanities/Social Sciences, and Science & Engineering), as well as branch libraries on each of the urban campuses. Each Pullman library is supported by one or more subject specialists responsible for reference, collection development, and instruction in relevant disciplines. While these subject specialists are responsible for providing instructional services to liaison departments and programs, they are supported by an independent Library Instruction department that includes four full-time librarians, and two instruction coordinators housed in the largest public service units (Humanities/Social Sciences and Science & Engineering). Of the campus diversity initiatives briefly noted above, the one that has been most consistently supported by the WSU Libraries has been the academic program in Comparative Ethnic Studies.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional liaison services to the faculty, staff, and students associated with the Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies are provided by a subject specialist assigned to that program and to collection areas including African-American Studies, Chicano/Latino Studies, Asian-American Studies, and Native American Studies (Washington State University Libraries, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004e). Individual efforts aimed at students of color have also been extended on an irregular basis by librarians who have served as faculty advisors to one or more student cultural groups. While these efforts were appreciated, they waxed and waned with librarian involvement in student group advising. It has only been within the last few years that a more programmatic approach to developing “instructional outreach liaison assignments” to

student services programs such as the Office of Multicultural Student Services has taken hold (Albin, et al., 2005; Cummings, 2005; Johnson, McCord and Walter, 2003; Washington State University Libraries, 2004d). The purpose of the present study was to build on this programmatic approach to outreach to student services offices by developing a comprehensive approach to identifying the information and instructional service needs of students affiliated with one or more of the programs housed in the Office of Multicultural Student Services and by delivering services directly to students through these programs.

### **Methodology**

In order to effectively plan for future collaboration between the Washington State University Libraries and the Office of Multicultural Student Services, an information needs assessment instrument (Appendix 1) was constructed and disseminated to students associated either with one of the four cultural centers on campus – African-American Student Center; Asian American and Pacific Islander Student Center; Chicana/o Latina/o Student Center, and Native American Student Center – or with the Academic Enrichment Center also housed in the Multicultural Student Center (Office of Multicultural Student Services, n.d. – a). The instrument was developed by the author in collaboration with the subject specialist for Comparative Ethnic Studies and the instructional outreach liaison to the Office of Multicultural Student Services, and modified and approved by staff members and graduate assistants in the Multicultural Student Center. Once approved by the Institutional Review Board, the instrument was disseminated to students in both print and electronic form through the staff, student advisors, and peer mentors housed in the Office of Multicultural Student Services.

There are many reasons why one might conduct an information needs assessment, but some of the most common include:

- setting priorities among collections, services, and organizational missions;
- positioning the library among its competitors in the local information environment;
- helping staff to develop a new vision for library services;
- marketing the library; and
- providing insight into the decisions made by non-library users

(Westbrook, 2001).

The aim of this study was to identify the information needs of students of color who took part in academic support programs offered through the Academic Enrichment Center, as well as those of students of color who affiliated with one of the cultural centers primarily for social or cultural reasons, and to identify priorities for future outreach efforts and service activities by the Washington State University Libraries. A preliminary list of possible collaborative endeavors was generated through discussion between librarians and staff at the Multicultural Student Center. This list included:

- Orientation to the WSU Libraries for First-Year Students
- Orientation to the WSU Libraries for Transfer Students
- Workshop on Finding Information About Diverse Populations in the Library and on the Web
- Critical Thinking and the World Wide Web
- One-Stop Web Site for Finding Information About Diverse Populations through the WSU Libraries

- Finding Science and Health Information in the Library and on the Web
- Finding Information About Diverse Populations through the State and Federal Government
- Alternative Voices in the Media: Finding Information in Minority-Owned Publications

These options were included as Item 10 of the information needs assessment instrument (Appendix 1). Data collected from respondents was then analyzed to create descriptive statistics that could help to identify high-priority outreach initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

## **Results**

Distributed to students affiliated either with one of the four cultural centers, or with the Academic Enrichment Center, between October 25 – November 10, 2003, a total of 63 completed surveys were returned for analysis.<sup>6</sup> Students returning the survey represented a useful demographic sample, including students from each of the cultural centers across all levels of the undergraduate experience. Center affiliation for respondents was reported as:

- African-American Student Center (30.2%)
- Asian-American/Pacific Islander Student Center (23.8%)
- Chicano/a/Latino/a Student Center (23.8%)
- Native American Student Center (1.59%)
- Academic Enrichment Program (20.6%).

Academic level of respondents was reported as:

- First-Year Student (12.7%);
- Sophomore (17.5%)

- Junior (46%)
- Senior (22.2%).

Given long-standing difficulties encountered by the WSU Libraries in developing instructional programs for transfer students, it is also worth noting that approximately one-third of respondents reported having transferred to Washington State University from another institution.

Respondents were asked to categorize the frequency of their use of the WSU Libraries and to identify their primary reasons for library use. Responses to these items are summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

Daily	14.3%
One or Twice each Week	23.8%
A Few Times each Month	34.9%
Once or Twice each Semester	17.5%
Rarely	6.35%
Never	3.17%

**Table 2: Frequency of Library Use**



Find Articles/Books	74.6%
Attend Workshop/Class	9.52%
Group Study Space	47.6%
Use the Internet	58.7%
Research Assistance	20.6%
Pick Up Materials from Other Libraries	23.8%

**Table 3: Reason(s) for Library Use (Multiple Answers Allowed)**

Respondents were also asked to identify any problems they encountered when using library resources and services, and to identify their personal approach to beginning the research process. Responses to these items are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

None	36.5%
Finding Books/Journals	44.4%
Finding Material for my Research	25.4%
Finding Someone to Help Me with my Research	20.6%
Finding Information on the Web Site	15.9%
Collections Inadequate for my Research Needs	9.52%

**Table 4: Problems Encountered When Using Library Resources or Services**

Ask a Friend	14.8%
Ask a Professor	9.3%
Surf the Internet	66.7%
Go to the Library	7.4%

**Table 5: Starting Points for the Research Process**

Finally, respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point (Likert) scale their degree of interest in a series of potential projects identified by librarians and Multicultural Student Center staff members (see above) as potentially useful for students wishing to learn more about the location, evaluation, management, and use of information on topics related to populations and communities of color. Responses to this item are summarized in Table 6.

Workshop on Locating Diverse Voices in the Media	3.84
Develop Library Web Portal to Information on Diverse Populations	3.45
Workshop on Finding Government Information on Diverse Populations	3.24
Workshop on Finding Information on Diverse Populations/Multicultural Topics in the Library and on the Web	3.24
Transfer Student Orientation to the Library	3.06
Workshop on Critical Thinking and Information/Web Resources	2.98
First-Year Student Orientation	2.93
Workshop on Finding Health and Science Information	2.89

**Table 6: Desired Library Services (5=“Highly Desired”)**

## **Discussion**

Several interesting aspects of the information use patterns of students affiliated with the Multicultural Student Center were identified by the information needs

assessment. Among these were library use patterns and approaches to beginning the research process.

For example, it is clear from the responses that the students associated with the Multicultural Student Center make regular use of library resources and facilities. Over two-thirds of the respondents reported making use of the library at least “a few times a month” (with almost one-quarter reporting weekly or more frequent use). While the most common reason for visiting the library was to locate books or articles for personal use, access to the Internet was cited almost as regularly as an impetus for entering the library. The professional assistance offered to students by librarians in the areas of information and instructional services, by contrast, were among the least commonly cited reasons for library use. Given that the number of students receiving instruction in the library has doubled in the past five years (with almost 11,000 students attending workshops and classes in 2002-2003), the fact that fewer than 10% of the students who responded to this survey cited instruction as a reason for visiting the library bears further study.

The fact that professional services were among the reasons for library use cited least often complements the approaches students described as the typical beginning of their research process. Two-thirds of respondents reported that their first step in the research process was to access the Internet. While further study is required to determine the type of Internet sites being accessed by students who cited this as the first step in their research process, these responses do reinforce the conclusions about the impact of the Internet on student research habits advanced in studies such as Jones et al. (2002) and OCLC (2002). Also noteworthy is the degree to which peers were preferred over professors or librarians as a personal source of information when beginning the research

process. For the vast majority of these students, the research process is entirely unmediated in terms of their use of the experience and expertise of campus professionals in the library and the classroom.

These and other results drawn from the survey allow the following conclusions to be drawn regarding future collaborative efforts between the Washington State University Libraries and the Multicultural Student Center:

- Development of Web-based information resources easily accessible to students of color is critical. If students are four times more likely to begin their research using the Internet (66.7%) than by any other medium, the library must develop and promote Web-based resources on topics of interest to students of color;
- Provision of instruction to peer mentors housed in the Multicultural Student Center has the potential for significant improvement in library services to students of color. If students are more likely to consult a peer for assistance in beginning their research than they are to consult either a librarian or a member of the classroom faculty, the library must provide an opportunity for the peer mentors already in place in the Multicultural Student Center to learn as much about effective use of information as possible; and
- Existing resources and services must be more effectively marketed within the multicultural student community. Responses suggest that students feel unsure about a number of aspects of the research process, but do not regularly consult librarians for assistance. One student suggested that the

library should offer a course in how to make effective use of information resources – a course that has, in fact, been regularly offered for over six years (Washington State University Libraries, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

A number of opportunities exist for effective collaboration between the Washington State University Libraries and the Multicultural Student Center. The development and implementation of the information needs assessment survey provided an opportunity for detailed discussions between professionals housed in each unit, and the results of the survey reinforced priorities that those discussions had already suggested. Among the projects implemented during the Spring 2004 semester were:

- Inclusion of a library component in the training offered to participants in the Office of Multicultural Student Services mentoring program (Office of Multicultural Student Services, n.d. – d). While not the full-blown training program offered to students in the Peer Information Counseling (PIC) program, this program followed a similar approach, i.e., to provide specialized training in information use and library organization to a group of peer educators in place in the student communities of color at Washington State University;
- Preparation of a section on library and information resources and services to be included in future editions of the Multicultural Student Center Handbook distributed to students of color each Fall. By highlighting existing collections and resources, and promoting services such as reference and instruction, the handbook may direct students of color more

effectively to existing resources, while also alerting them to the professional assistance available to them through the Washington State University Libraries; and

- Development of a set of workshops related to information use and library resources that can be included in the regular series of workshops offered through the Office of Multicultural Student Services' Academic Enrichment Center.

Projects identified as targets for future development included:

- Development of a Web portal directing students to information about populations of color, library materials written by, or about, people of color, pathfinders outlining useful print and electronic resources for academic research into issues of concern to communities of color, and to individuals within the library who can provide personal instruction and assistance for students working in these areas.

The development and delivery of the information needs assessment through the programs housed in the Multicultural Student Center helped the Washington State University Libraries to identify a number of short- and long-term projects that might have a significant impact on information access and use among students of color. At the same time, a number of questions were raised about the information environment at Washington State University. Why, for example, were student respondents at WSU so reticent about consulting librarians for their information needs when earlier studies (e.g., Whitmire, 1999) suggest that students of color may be more likely to engage in activities such as asking a librarian for help than their White counterparts? How can the existing

credit-bearing information literacy course (General Education 300) be more effectively marketed to students of color? How can library services be more effectively integrated into existing campus programs such as the federally-supported TRIO programs? Further research is clearly called for, but these projects, and the opportunities for ongoing communication regarding diverse student information needs, suggest that a framework has been constructed for ongoing collaboration that will be more consistent and thoughtful in its development and support than has been the case in the past.

## Notes

1. The term “multicultural student center” will be used throughout this study to refer to the “minority cultural centers” (Young, Jr., 1991) found on many college campuses. An individual campus may have one or more centers focused on providing services to members of an identified ethnic or racial minority group (e.g., African-American Student Center, Native American Student Center), or, as is the case in the institution examined in this study, a “multicultural student center” may be provided to meet the needs of the members of a variety of identified groups. While many campuses also support student centers designed to support the needs of other identified groups, e.g., Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered (GLBT) students, Jewish students, the focus in this study is on student centers designed to reach out to students who identify with specific racial or ethnic minority groups.

2. Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement (“McNair Fellows”) programs are all part of the U.S. Department of Education’s TRIO programs. Further information on these and other TRIO programs can be found online at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>.

3. “Summer Bridge” is a generic term used for intensive academic and social orientation programs that offer students of color, first-generation students, and any other student who might be considered “high-risk” an opportunity to succeed in college. Many Summer Bridge programs are only the first step in an academic and social support structure provided to these students throughout their undergraduate experience. For representative



examples, see Groups Student Support Services (2005), and Office of Multicultural Services (2004).

4. The Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies was previously known as the Department of Comparative American Cultures. Both names can still be found on the Washington State University Web site, e.g. Department of Comparative Ethnic Studies (n.d.).

5. While research shows that different racial and ethnic groups may face different barriers to effective use of the academic library, the multicultural and multiracial approach taken by the WSU Multicultural Student Center to providing academic support services suggested that an aggregate review of the data collected would be appropriate (as opposed to reporting results on each item by racial/ethnic/cultural affiliation). While this approach was appropriate given the exploratory nature of this research project, it is a limitation that would have to be addressed by any subsequent study.

6. Owing to the broad dissemination method employed, there is no way to determine the number of students who received the survey instrument (n), or the overall response rate.

## Appendix 1: Information Needs Assessment Instrument

### Washington State University Libraries

#### Survey of Multicultural Student Information Needs

Fall 2003

The purpose of this WSU Libraries survey is to identify the information needs of students and staff making use of the services of the Office of Multicultural Student Services. The information collected will be used to evaluate the current services being offered to multicultural student groups by the Washington State University Libraries and to help establish priorities for future service programs.

**Directions:** Please answer each questions as completely as possible. Please return the completed survey to Shellah Imperio at the Academic Enrichment Center (CUB 51E) by **November 10, 2003**.

#### I DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Which of the following best describes your role in the Multicultural Student Center?

Student                      Mentor                      Staff

2. If you are a student, which of the following best describes your academic level?

First-Year Student                      Senior  
Sophomore                      Professional Student  
Junior                      Graduate Student

3. If you are an undergraduate student, did you transfer to Washington State University from another institution?

Yes                      No

#### II LIBRARY EXPERIENCE

4. How often do you use the WSU Libraries during the academic year?

Daily                      Once or twice a semester  
Once or twice a week                      Rarely  
A few times a month                      Never

**5. For what reason(s) do you visit the library (check as many as apply)?**

Find articles/books

Use the Internet

Attend a workshop/class

Get help from a librarian with my research

Group study space

Pick up articles/books from other libraries

**6. If you are going to use the library, are you more likely to:**

Visit a library in person

Visit the library online through the WSU Libraries' Web site?

**7. Have you ever come to the library for instruction with one of your classes? If so, which one?**

Freshman Seminar (Gen Ed 104)

World Civilizations (Gen Ed 110/111)

English Composition (ENGL 101/201/301/402)

Other (please list department and course number)

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**8. Have you ever had any problems finding the information you need at the WSU Libraries? (check as many as are applicable)**

No, I haven't had any problems.

Yes, I have had problems locating books/journals in the library.

Yes, I have had problems finding books/articles that can help me with my research.

Yes, I have had problems finding the right person to help me with my research.

Yes, I have had problems finding information on the WSU Libraries' Web site.

Yes, the library doesn't seem to collect the books/journals I need for my research.

Any other specific problems that you have encountered?

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- 9. If you need to do research for a project (or just to find out something you want to know for your own use), are you more likely to start by:**

Asking a friend  
Asking a professor  
Surfing the Internet  
Going to the library

- 10. Based on your answer to Question 8, what is it about asking a friend or professor/surfing the Internet/going to the library that makes it a good place to start?**

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### III LIBRARY SERVICES AND THE MULTICULTURAL STUDENT CENTER (Academic Enrichment Center)

- 11. Please rate the following suggestions for library services according to the following scale (circle one of the following number after each suggestion):**

1 = "This wouldn't matter to me."  
3 = "Good idea. I'd try it if I had time."  
5 = "Great idea! Where can I sign up?"

A) Orientation to the WSU Libraries for First-Year Students (e.g., how to use the Griffin catalog to find books, how to use the Summit catalog to order books for free from other libraries, how to find articles using electronic indexes, how to find electronic books and journals, how to start research on the Web)

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

B) Orientation to the WSU Libraries for Transfer Students (see above)

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

C) Workshop on Finding Information About Diverse Populations in the Library and on the Web (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans, Chicano (a)/ Latino (a), Asian Americans)

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

D) Critical Thinking and the World Wide Web (or, How Do I Know When I've Found a Good Web Site?)

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

E) One-Stop Web Site for Finding Information About Diverse Populations through the WSU Libraries

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

F) Finding Science and Health Science Information in the Library and on the Web

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

G) Finding Information About Diverse Populations through the State and Federal Government

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

H) Alternative Voices in the Media: Finding Information in Minority-Owned Publications

1 - - - - > 3 - - - - > 5

- 12. Please use this space to make any suggestions of your own about instructional workshops, information services, or other print or Web-based materials (e.g., handouts, Web pages) that would make it easier for you to use the WSU Libraries in your research.**

**Thank you for your time and ideas!**

**Please contact Shellah Imperio [simperio@wsu.edu](mailto:simperio@wsu.edu) or Scott Walter [swalter@wsu.edu](mailto:swalter@wsu.edu) if you have any questions about this survey, or wish to discuss any of the questions further.**

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